

archaeologist an expert who studies the past by examining objects that people have left behind

historian an expert who studies and records the past

geographer an expert who studies and creates maps of Earth's natural and human-made features

artifact an object made or used by people in the past

prehistoric before written history

Archaeologists use tools to delicately retrieve artifacts, which give them clues about the past. A grid system is often used to organize where on a site each artifact was found.



1. Detectives Who Study the Past

Scholars who study human society are called social scientists. Many social scientists can help us study the past. Among these “history detectives” are **archaeologists, historians, and geographers.**

Archaeologists: Digging Up the Past Archaeologists study the past by examining objects, or *artifacts*, that people have left behind. These **artifacts** are anything made or used by humans, such as clothing, tools, weapons, and coins. When archaeologists discover a place that has artifacts, they ask questions like these: Who lived in this place? When did they live here? What were they like? Then archaeologists study the artifacts for clues.

Historians: Recording the Past Historians are the recorders of the past. Human beings have been around for such a long time that historians tend to focus mostly on the last few thousand years, when people began leaving written records. Historians want to answer this question: What happened in the past? To find out, they study all kinds of artifacts and **documents.** They read diaries and letters. Besides asking what happened in the past, historians try to understand why events happened the way they did.

Geographers: Mapping the Past

Geographers study the natural **features** of Earth, such as water, landforms, plants, and animals. They also look at human-made features, such as towns, roads, bridges, and dams. These scientists help us answer such questions as: Where did people live? How did they use their **environment** to survive? Geographers often create maps to show what they have learned.

Social scientists who study **prehistoric** history face a unique challenge—a lack of evidence from this period. In fact, huge gaps of time have no evidence at all. Therefore, scientists may come up with different answers or theories about how humans came to be.